



Comment on SAMHSA Control of 1-800-Suicide

As CEO of Mental Health America, the leading national nonprofit organization focusing on mental health for all Americans, I am deeply committed to suicide prevention and the 24/7 availability of professional, warm and effective crisis call center services. I believe strongly the two national hotlines for suicide should be coordinated jointly. I also believe that SAMHSA control would ensure we do not face another possible threat of the number being disconnected, which would be disastrous given the volume of callers in need.

I understand how important these safety-net services are and how the public relies on them in time of need. The federal government has increased the amount of funding to suicide prevention in the past several years, but it is still so limited for the number of deaths and the scope and scale of this important public health problem. Giving SAMHSA full and complete control of this hotline number will help leverage those funds to their best impact and ensure that individuals in crisis receive a well trained and reliable answer, providing help when it is needed.

I am aware of the criticism that has been levied at SAMHSA and Link2Health (MHA of NYC) regarding concerns the new 1-800-273-TALK line does not serve the needs of suicidal callers, does not respect their privacy, and does not have the level of technical sophistication possessed by the previous management. I completely disagree with these conclusions, and have found the opposite in my interactions with crisis call centers. It is our experience that this network takes privacy issues very seriously and works effectively to actively engage those in crisis, to give them choices about services and to help link them with needed care.

I believe reversing course at this juncture would set back these vitally important suicide prevention efforts, and hope the FCC will solicit the views of the crisis centers and community mental health providers who know this question best prior to making such a critical decision. Over 30,000 individuals end their lives by suicide in the United States each year. This decision matters. Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,
David Shern, PhD.
Mental Health America President & CEO